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Sermon on the Epistle for Fourth Sunday after Easter.

JAMES 1, 16—21.

In the verses that immediately precede our text, James has reminded the Christians of the truth, that God is not the author of sin nor of any evil. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." God, accordingly, is not the author of sin; He never decreed it, nor encouraged it, nor connived at it. "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Him." And it necessarily follows that God is not the author of all the other evils that infest this world and make it a vale of tears. For all the other evils, pain, sickness, all manner of grief and trouble, above all, death, are a consequence of sin, entered the world together with sin. So, then, if God did not will the former, He did not will or decree the latter. God, in short, is not the author of any evil.

God, on the other hand, is the Author of everything that is good; He is the Giver of all good gifts. That is the lesson inculcated in our text. "Do not err, my beloved brethren! Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." God is here described as a light "without variableness and shadow of turning." Light is here a picture of all that is good. The meaning of the figure of speech, then, is: God is Himself good; He is the perfection of good; He is without the slightest shadow of evil. So, then, of course, all that is good must come from Him. As a light sends forth its rays in all directions and lights up everything that lies within its range, so God, the great and perfect light of good, sends forth the beams of good and of blessings upon His creatures. He is the source whence all the good comes that we or anybody and anything else enjoys. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

The apostle here divides the various good gifts of God into two classes: "good gifts" in general and "perfect gifts." By "good gifts,"

according to Luther's explanation and that of various other leading commentators, the apostle means the temporal blessings of God which we enjoy, while the "perfect gifts" are those that concern the eternal salvation of our soul, whose full possession we shall enjoy in the world to come. Now the "good gifts" of God which we enjoy in this life are already of a great variety and countless in number. Who could enumerate them all? I cannot think of a better enumeration of the temporal blessings of God than that of Luther in the explanation of the First Article of our Creed: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life, that He defends me," etc. Ah! yes, everything that we possess and enjoy here in this world, every comfort that we have, every morsel that we eat, yea, every breath that we draw, is a "good gift" of our kind heavenly Father. O that we would always consider it such! That we could cease to ascribe these things to ourselves, to our own labor and toil, our ingenuity and diligence! That we could learn to look upon them as "good gifts" of our merciful Father which we have not deserved or earned in any way, but all of which, as Luther goes on to say, God gives us "purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us; for all which it is (therefore) our duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him." O that we would learn this important lesson better and better, that all things we possess and enjoy are good gifts of God's mercy for which it is our duty to praise and glorify Him in word and deed!

Now after having, by way of preface, called your attention to the "good gifts" of God which He vouchsafes to us in this world for our bodily life and welfare, I wish now to turn to a special spiritual blessing, to which our text calls attention in the following, which is the embodiment and source of all other spiritual gifts and blessings. I wish to inculcate now upon your hearts and minds

THAT THE WORD OF GOD IS THE GREATEST BLESSING AND
GRANDEST GIFT OF GOD.

According to the text it is such,

1. *Because it works regeneration;*
2. *Because it is able to save our souls.*

1.

Of this greatest blessing and grandest gift of God, James says in connection with the former: "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures." When we consider that immediately before he had put

forth the truth that God is the Giver of all good gifts, we are naturally led to infer that also what is mentioned here must be one of those perfect gifts which descend from above. And such, indeed, it is. In fact, it is the principal, the most glorious gift of God that is described to us here. Let us look at it more closely, and we shall recognize it as such.

James says that "of His own will God begat us with the Word of Truth that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures." This means, to put it briefly, that by the power of His Word, the Gospel, God has begotten, or regenerated, us into a new spiritual life, by working conversion and faith in our hearts, thus making us a kind of first-fruits of His creatures whom He chose from among the rest as His peculiar treasure, and who, therefore, are dear to Him and shall inherit all the eternal blessings of heaven.

To divide up the words, he says that God begat us by the Word of Truth, which means, He gave us a new life, a spiritual life, which before we had not. For that is the meaning of beget, to generate into life. Such, then, my friends, is the grand gift which through the Word of Truth God bestows upon us: He begets in us a new life; He creates in us the life of faith. For naturally there is no such life within us. We are by nature spiritually dead. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," says Christ, "and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." We are all flesh born of flesh. Since we were born into this world, we are all endowed with physical life. But that is all. Spiritually we are dead. We are "dead in trespasses and sins," says Paul. In order to receive spiritual life, we must be born again by the Spirit, for only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, as Christ says; only by the operation of the Spirit of God can spiritual life be begotten in us.

Now in order to understand what a great blessing this spiritual life is which God begets in us through the Word of Truth, we must consider for what glorious purpose it is generated, which is, "that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures." By this work of regeneration, then, we are made first-fruits of God's creatures. In the Old Testament the firstborn sons were consecrated to God. Thus we, through being regenerated by Him, become consecrated to Him; we are made His peculiar treasure, a treasure that is dear to Him, one that He cherishes. In other words, we become dear children of God and heirs of salvation through regeneration. For before this new spiritual life has been created in us, we are servants of sin and children of the devil. We are indeed dead to all that is good, but, alas! we are alive to everything evil, and, of course, as long as we remain in that state, we cannot be God's children nor heirs of His salvation, but we must be children of the devil and victims of eternal death and damnation. But when God begets us into spiritual life by the Word of Truth, then we are transplanted from the kingdom of the devil into the kingdom of God,

then we become dear children of God. For this new life consists in true faith, which appropriates the forgiveness of sin through the merits of Christ, and which shuns sin and follows after righteousness. So, then, there is nothing that condemns us any longer, nothing that could exclude us from heaven; we are heirs of eternal salvation by regeneration. Oh, truly, is it not a precious gift of God which is described here?

For a gift, a free, unmerited gift of God, it is and remains. "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth." It is God that generates, creates, this new life in our bosom. We cannot do it ourselves. Why, we are dead! How can a dead person communicate life to himself? As little as a person can beget himself into physical existence and give birth to himself, just as little can we beget this spiritual life within us. As our natural conception is a work of God's almighty power, so the begetting of this spiritual life can only be wrought by His omnipotence. Indeed, He begat us! Our regeneration is a "good gift" of God. And it is a free gift of His grace. "Of His own will begat He us," says the text. We did not deserve it. It is not because He saw anything in us that attracted Him and prompted Him to bestow this blessing upon us; we deserved the contrary, death and punishment. His grace alone moved Him to take pity on us, to beget in us the new life of faith, and to adopt us as His dear children.

And the means through which He imparts this glorious gift, through which He works regeneration in us, is "the Word of Truth." He could perform this act without employing any means, but as He has chosen to employ the agency of the parents to beget the physical life of a child, so He begets this spiritual life by "the Word of Truth." This Word of Truth is the Gospel, for that brings to us the glorious truth of the forgiveness of our sins by faith in Christ, and by having this Word of the Gospel preached to us, God offers us the power to accept what it offers; He kindles in our hearts the flame of faith which constitutes the new life. Without this Gospel, whether it be preached or read, no spiritual life is possible; only by means of it God begets new life in us.

O my friends, is not the Word of God the greatest blessing and the grandest gift of God? Without it there is no spiritual life, no faith, no salvation; by means of it alone God imparts these blessings to us. Nor is that all; by means of this Word God not merely begets spiritual life, but also preserves it. This Word of God is also able to save our souls. That is the second point therefore, which we must consider.

2.

The new life that God begets in us in regeneration is constantly in danger of being destroyed and lost as long as we are living in this world. It is not true, as some would have it, that faith once

kindled in the heart cannot be lost again, that a person who has been truly converted cannot backslide. This is a very dangerous doctrine. It makes people secure and unmindful of the dangers by which their faith is beset on every side. Why, say they, if there is no possibility of losing my faith, then I need not be anxious and watchful; then I may live just about as I please. And before they are aware of it, the old wicked Foe has them in his clutches again. No, no, my friends, we are always in danger of losing our faith, of relapsing from spiritual life into spiritual death, as long as we live in the state of probation here on earth. For that is what this life is intended for, a state of probation. It was that before the fall of man. Adam and Eve, though created after God's image, yet were made so that they could sin. God wanted to prove, to try them; they were in a certain way to show themselves worthy of the eternal happiness for which He had created them. And thus it is now after the fall: when by God's almighty operation the new life has been kindled in man, his faith must first stand the test. As Adam and Eve could fall and lose the image of God, so a Christian may fall and lose the image of God which by God's grace had been in part restored in him. And this possibility of losing the divine image again remains until death ends the test and trial, and the disembodied soul leaves this world of sin, and wings its flight to the throne of God where it is confirmed in blessedness, and where all possibility of losing it is cut off forever.

Until then, until death, there is danger of losing the faith and the blessing which in regeneration has become ours. Ah! and many and great are the dangers that beset our faith on every side. Need I recount them? I have so often called your attention to them. Is not the devil constantly walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, seeking to rob us of our faith and to entangle us again in the toils of sin? Is not the wicked world round about us ever on the alert, tempting us in many ways to renounce godliness and to join in its sinful, wicked pursuits? And have these two enemies without not a terrible ally within us? Is not our sinful flesh on their side, assisting them in every way, opposing the good work of the Spirit in our heart, trying to undermine in every way the bulwark of faith? Let me not enlarge upon this subject any longer. Take warning, my friends! Be not secure! Think not, I am all right; nobody is going to destroy my faith; I am too good a Christian; I am too strongly rooted; no tempest of affliction can overturn me! "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall!" And I would beg especially the young and inexperienced: Beware of the snares of the Tempter! Beware of the dangers that beset your soul! Your faith has not yet been put to a severe test; most likely, you still look upon the bright side of life only; you are little aware and mindful of the dangers by which you are encompassed.

Therefore heed my warning: Beware, lest you lose the life, which in your blessed baptism was engendered in your breast.

But do not, oh! do not trust in yourselves to accomplish this! "With might of ours naught can be done; soon were our loss effected!" Nay, remember the advice of our text: "Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls!" This precious gift of God not only kindles the flame of faith in our hearts, but it also nourishes it and shields it so that the fitful gusts of temptation and affliction will not be able to extinguish it. It is, at the same time, the means by which God begets, or generates, spiritual life in us, and by which He preserves and supports it. His Word must give us strength to resist the temptations that beset us. It must be the weapon with which we defend ourselves against our enemies. We must learn to hurl "It is written!" in the face of the devil, as Christ did when tempted by Satan. Then he will be unable to overcome us; then we shall be able to resist him, and he will flee from us. God's Word will give us strength to withstand all trials and temptations in life, and finally to go safely through the dark valley of death and to enter into our eternal home of bliss above. God's Word alone is able to save our souls.

Therefore let us learn to make the right use of this greatest of all blessings and this grandest of all the gifts of God! Let us remember that, in the first place, we must "be swift to hear it!" It is impossible to be a Christian and to neglect the hearing of God's Word. It is the nourishment of our spiritual life; without this nourishment it must perish, as physical life cannot exist without food and drink. Therefore be swift, or eager, to hear God's Word! Improve the opportunities which God has afforded you. And then, too, "receive with meekness the engrafted Word!" Do not feel hurt and insulted if you are reproached in a sermon, if something is said that strikes you. Receive with meekness the Word preached to you. Thank God for having given you a faithful pastor who reminds you of your sins and weaknesses and warns you, etc.

G. L.

Funeral Sermon from Rev. 7, 14—17.

IN CHRIST JESUS, OUR RESURRECTED SAVIOR,

DEARLY BELOVED MOURNERS AND FRIENDS:—

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" That is the anthem of victory and triumph which we Christians sing at the graves of our friends who are asleep in Christ, and, by this joyful acclaim, we show that a Christian's death is not a conquest and victory for death and the grave, but, a *victory* over death and over the grave.

A Christian's death, therefore, is not only a cause of weeping and mourning, but it is also an occasion of triumph and thanksgiving. It is true, we Christians are not insensible to the pain of parting, nor does God expect of us that we should feel no sorrow when one whom we have loved is taken from us. Christ Himself wept at the grave of Lazarus, and we Christians weep at the departure of our loved ones; but, at the same time, we do not weep as those who have no hope. Our sorrow is mingled with thanksgiving and praise, knowing that one who is taken in Christ has conquered death and the grave.

It is so in the case of every Christian, but it is especially so in this case. Here, also, while we weep and are moved at the departure of our beloved brother, yet, in the midst of our weeping and sorrow, we are also thanking God and praising Him for His mercy in giving him deliverance from his woe and victory over death and the grave.

We weep and are filled with sorrow at the departure of our brother. We, who knew him and who learned more and more to love and to esteem him highly for those graces which God, in His mercy, bestowed upon him, and which were revealed in him more and more through sorrow and distress, we are deeply affected by his departure. Not to feel the pain of parting from such a brother and loyal friend would be inhuman. It does grieve us to see this husband separated from his wife; the father, who loved his child, taken from that child.

And we here in the congregation know that we have lost a faithful brother, and one who continually thought of the welfare of his congregation, spoke for it, prayed for it, and would have done much more if he had had the ability and the opportunity. And his brothers, friends, and relatives know that this brother of theirs was attached to them with sincere love and regard.

And yet, we all join in praising God. Why? Because we believe, and may be certain, that he who is sleeping here, asleep in Jesus, belongs to those of whom our text speaks, and is one of that multitude who are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night. Therefore, let me, upon this occasion, speak to you upon that subject of which this text treats:

THE BATTLE AND VICTORY OF A CHRISTIAN.

1.

Our text, and the words that immediately precede our text, tell us that St. John the Divine had a vision of heaven and eternity. He saw God upon His throne and an innumerable multitude of all kindreds and people, tongues and nations; they were clothed in white raiment, and had palms in their hands, and sang beautiful, lovely hymns of praise to God, their Creator. And when he asked,

“What are these?” the angel told him, “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” He thereby told John the Divine that those whom he saw with such clean robes made so white, singing hymns, had not always been so blessed, had not always been so clean and perfect, that they had not always presented such a picture of joy and victory, but that at one time they had been in great tribulation, and that their robes had been unclean; they had been the soldiers who fought the hottest battle.

He thereby referred to the fact that when Christ calls us out of the darkness of this world into the light of His Gospel and makes us His followers, He does not at once translate us into heavenly bliss. He does not at once ask us to partake of His glory, but He invites us, first of all, to suffer with Him and go through the trials and tribulations that are allotted to us. He wishes that we Christians first taste something of sin’s curse, before we experience heaven’s bliss. Therefore, he has laid down the rule that “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” If we are not chastised by God, we are not children of God, and if any one here hath no cross and sorrow, he should be far from thinking that everything is right with him. Such a person has, rather, great reason to ask himself whether he is a Christian at all; for Christ tells us that if we are Christians, we must bear our cross. Only by the way of battle, by the way of tribulation, by the way of sorrow can we come to the crown and glory that God hath prepared for us.

Therefore, Christ expressly saith: “Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep,” and, “Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh,” Luke 6.

Of this weeping, my beloved friends, our brother who is now asleep had his measure. He was also called to go through great tribulation; God showed him that he was leading him, not according to the counsel of any man, not according to his own counsel, not according to our brother’s counsel, not according to his friends’ or relatives’ counsel, but according to *God’s* counsel. Wonderful and strange counsel it was, and many a one who beheld him in his suffering and distress was moved to think of that word of the Apostle: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”

No doubt, it was with him as with all of us, that even in his youth Satan, the world, and his own flesh tried to overcome and tried to ensnare him, but, reared in true Christian faith by his parents, he knew the Holy Scripture from his boyhood and was made wise

thereby unto salvation. With prayer, with God's Word and the sacrament he fought this battle, and when, in the midst of this struggle, the time came that he was to enter holy matrimony, he married a young woman of his own faith and religion, and had his pastor to bless the matrimonial union with God's Word and prayer.

During his illness he often told me of that blessed Word which was spoken to him at the time of his marriage, and that it had been to him a power of strength and assistance in his severe battle, for soon thereafter it was God's pleasure to try him with reverses and misfortunes. He made a heroic effort to improve his circumstances, even working amid unhealthy surroundings, but it was God's will to try him with fearful severity; he was stricken with this disease which sapped his life for eleven years. Ah, words cannot describe, my dear friends, what those eleven years of physical suffering were to him. In the first place, there was that constant disappointment of new hope. From time to time, he tried this and that remedy, and often, when I came to see him, he would tell me of some new remedy or some new treatment that he was trying, and, with a new hope, he would endeavor to regain his lost health, but it was only a few days, or weeks, at most, and he would tell me that his hopes were shattered again.

Ah, my friends, if one is taken into one battle and stricken down, that is easier to bear than to be again and again lifted up with a new vision of better things, only to be hurled down again and again into utter gloom. It is God's will that we should do what we can for our physical health. It is God's will that we should try as long as we can to recover our strength, not only to use prayer and God's Word, but also to use that which He has created for our physical condition; and Brother Behrens did that wherever God gave him an opportunity. How sad and dark it must have been, when, again and again, after using this and that remedy and treatment, even going away and using baths, he finally had to say: "It is all in vain." I remember, especially, the time that his eyes began to fail and physicians gave him hope that through an operation his eyesight might be restored, how, with great hopefulness (as was always his way) and with earnest prayer to God, he underwent the pain of the operation, saying: "The pain will be small if only my eyesight be restored," and yet, very soon he had to confess that the operation was in vain,—his eyesight was gone. And thus, in this direction and in that direction, hope was again and again disappointed, and little by little he withered and sank into greater feebleness and helplessness.

Ah, my friends, what a battle it was! And yet, that was not his only battle. When I at one time reminded him that there, in the hospital, surrounded by Christian friends, taken care of by Christian nurses, away from the temptations of the world, he was

not so exposed to sin's assaults as he would be out in the world, he told me: "Yes, but the devil and evil thoughts and doubts assault me right here." It was also a spiritual battle that he had to fight continually. How many, with far less provocation, take refuge in sinful means to regain their health! How many lay hands on themselves to take their own lives, and thus rush before God's judgment before He has called them! Do you suppose that he, being human, was never assailed with such Satanic temptations? Satan knows his advantage, and assaults the poor weak Christians in their darkest moments. Did he not attack even the Holy Son of God when He had hungered forty days and forty nights?—Surely, our brother is one of those who come out of great tribulation. For eleven years he struggled and battled physically and spiritually.

But wherein lay his strength, and how did he bear it and conquer? If you had asked him, would he have told you, "See, I am a man of such great power and spiritual strength"? No, my friends, as he often told you, told other friends, pastor and students, "I have no strength in myself at all. If God did not help me, keep me, uphold me and strengthen me, I would soon be lost." He did not only come out of great trial and tribulation, but he belonged also to those (and that is the most important thing) who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. His trust was not in himself; he did not have a false trust in his own flesh and blood. He often declared what we confess in the Third Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." So God upheld him. Christ, the Good Shepherd, who had been his shepherd from his youth, and who had also cared for and kept him in later life, fulfilled to him the promise which I so often quoted to him: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." He feared at times that he would not remain faithful and patient to the last, and he sometimes believed that, because of his suffering and weakness, he would lose faith and confidence, and finally perish. But God's Word strengthened him and preserved him in the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not believe that his own suffering made up for his past transgressions and sins, or that his own suffering saved him. He did not say: "I have suffered so much on this earth that God will give me no further suffering." No; his hope was in Jesus Christ alone. He knew that by the suffering of Jesus on the cross he had the forgiveness of sins. He made his robe white from all transgression and sin *in the blood of the Lamb*. And, let me say to you, if you knew him in all his suffering and distress, no matter how much you

pitied him and felt sorry for him, he was far better off in all his suffering than an unbeliever is in all his riches, power, and good health; and if you do not wash your robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb, there is in store for you that which is a thousand times worse than anything that happened to him on this earth. Your eternity will be far, far worse than the short time of his suffering on earth.

In the midst of all his suffering he did not think, selfishly, always of himself. He did what he could to advise many unto godliness, and he prayed earnestly. I know that he prayed for his family; he prayed for his congregation; he prayed for his pastor. In his leisure he thought of their welfare, and took their cause before the Lord in earnest prayer. Let us not only be willing to contribute of our means for the building of churches and congregations, but also pray earnestly for them. We do not know how much has been accomplished through the prayer of earnest Christians. These invalid Christians accomplish more for their friends, their relatives, their family, their church and their pastor than we can now discover. Our deceased brother prayed also for the hospital which proved so great a blessing to him. Let us, therefore, also for the sake of these poor sufferers continue to be willing to give and to uphold these charitable institutions. It is true, there is nothing perfect in this world, and our charitable institutions are not perfect, yet how glad we were to know that our brother was among Christian people. No doubt that by the support of such an institution many helped his soul and helped to provide a place where such of our brethren who are stricken by a lingering illness may not be endangered by false superstitions. He himself was grateful to us and showed his gratitude to all who did anything for him. Ah, what a pleasure it should be to every one of us if we are able to give and to do for any one in distress, knowing that Christ Himself has said, "Whatsoever ye have done to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

See, my dear friends, that was our brother's battle, his severe battle! His strength was in God's Word, in the sacraments, and in prayer. Must we not look back upon it and admire God's grace and comfort that upheld him and gave him the victory, that made him patient to endure it?—And you, also, have your battle to fight. Why do you not seek that same strength and help in God's blessed Word? Why do *you* not go to the throne of Christ and bring there all your concerns, your sorrow and your trouble? What a victory He would also give you!

2.

Now the battle is over. What our beloved brother so earnestly prayed for and longed for, not for a day, weeks or months, but for years, that is his forever. For the past few years he had no longer

any hope of being restored to health here on this earth, but he lifted up his eyes unto heaven. He was always cheered when we spoke to him of heaven and read to him from Holy Scriptures what the Bible tells us of that fullness of joy and those pleasures forevermore at the right hand of God; and now at last he is delivered from all woe and pain and trouble. He is at rest.

At his resurrection he shall experience the truth of St. Paul's words: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." He is in that company described in the closing verses of our text: "Therefore are they before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more; neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

That is his victory. From all suffering and distress, patient and believing to the last, thankful to every one who assisted him, his soul finally was received by the angels and carried into Abraham's bosom.

How sweet will heaven be to him! For years he could not see, for years he could not eat properly, for years he was deprived of the simplest comforts. Now he is delivered from all this woe, and his soul is in paradise. No more hunger, no more thirst, no more pain and distress of the body. Ah, is it not time for us to praise and thank God that He has delivered him? We who prayed with him and cheered him and helped him to fight his battle, we cannot but rejoice with him at his eternal victory.

He wanted to understand why God led him in those strange ways, in that mysterious path, which he never understood on this earth. Now he will see it all, and will understand why God led him in this way. He will understand that this was the only path that would lead him to everlasting life and blessedness.

And he shall not be alone. He is in the company of the blessed. On this earth there were also ungodly persons, cold, heartless persons, who showed him ill will and increased his suffering. Aye, even the Christians are here not free from fault and sin whereby they pain each other. But there, before the throne of God, their robes are white, they sin no more. There, the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and all His saints shall be his companions forever. That, certainly, is not the least of heaven's joys.

Ah, may God grant us to be patient in our troubles, trusting to God's holy Word, calling on Him to give us strength when we are weak, and to fulfill to us His promises. Let us remember what so many of us learned at his bedside: Our sorrows and burdens are small when compared with his.

He that held and delivered him, can He not hold and deliver us?

If some Christians must endure such fiery trials, are we to murmur against God when He gives us a few lighter burdens?

Must I be carried to the skies,
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas?

God grant us that we, each in his or her place, follow those who have here led us the way through great tribulation, and have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, till we come to meet them before the throne of God where God shall then, also, wipe away all tears from our eyes.

Sure, I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord!
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.

Amen.

MARTIN S. SOMMER.

Anniversary Sermon.

(For a pastor.)

1 COR. 15, 10.

It is not a common everyday occurrence on account of which we are gathered together here to-day, and on account of which all our congregations have met here to-night. No; it is a special occasion, an occasion fraught with special interest and causing special joy and thanksgiving. We have met here to-day to celebrate a silver jubilee, the twenty-fifth anniversary of an ordination to the holy ministry. Twenty-five years ago on this Sunday, in far-away Texas, a young man stood before the altar of God. He had received a diploma from Concordia Seminary of St. Louis, Mo., certifying that he had studied diligently, passed the examination satisfactorily, and was well qualified to enter upon the duties of the holy ministry. He was asked whether he were ready to assume the holy office to which he had now been called. He replied: "Yes; after due consideration I am ready to assume this holy office to which God has called me. I vow and promise before God and His Church to perform and to discharge its duties according to the ability which God giveth, to the glory and praise of the Lord, the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of the souls."

The young man who took upon himself that holy office was the pastor who, for more than eleven years, has served this congregation, and whose twenty-fifth anniversary we are now celebrating. Twenty-five years have passed since he was ordained to the ministry. Twenty-five years, a quarter of a century, he has served the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and this is the reason why his congregation has arranged these jubilee services to-day. True, we well know that he would prefer to spend this day alone with his God, for the longer a faithful pastor labors, the more he becomes aware of his faults and shortcomings. His good work is but the performance of duty which is not remembered; but his mistakes are shortcomings which are remembered. Hence, after a lapse of twenty-five years, a faithful pastor would rather silently bewail and lament his shortcomings than pub-

lily celebrate his achievements. Nevertheless, we celebrate a jubilee to-day, and we do it to the glory of God and for the encouragement and strengthening of our brother in his further work. We rejoice and are glad, yea, we glory to-day. Our glorying, however, must be of the right nature, or it will be displeasing to God. Permit me, therefore, to show you from our text

IN WHAT A LUTHERAN PASTOR MAY GLORY ON THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS ORDINATION TO THE MINISTRY.

He may glory:

1. *"By the grace of God I am what I am,"* and,
2. *"His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain."*

1.

It is not right, my friends, if we do not know and bear in mind what we are. St. Paul says, "By the grace of God I am what I am." This should be every Christian's confession. Every Christian should confess: "I am what I am. I am highly favored of God. I am honored by the King of kings. I am a Christian. I am an elect of God; a holy and beloved, a justified and sanctified person; an heir of eternal life. I belong to the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the peculiar people. This I am by the grace of God. True, I am not worthy of this, I do not deserve it, but nevertheless it has pleased God to make me what I am." I say, dear friends, every Christian should confess this.

Much more so, however, a minister of the Gospel. He should never forget the honor and distinction that God has conferred upon him. On the contrary, he should ever acknowledge and appreciate it. This we are taught by the example of Paul. He said: "I am an apostle of Jesus Christ. True, I am not meet to be called an apostle, but nevertheless I am an apostle, for it has pleased God to call me to this office, and now I am what I am." So, just so, should every minister of the Gospel glory: "I am what I am. I am called by God to preach the Gospel." But is this something extraordinary? Is this such a great thing? True, many who occupy high stations in the world consider themselves far above a servant of the Word, yea, many even look with disdain and contempt upon the preachers of the Gospel. And in our own eyes we preachers appear very insignificant indeed. We consider it a small matter to have labored a number of years in the ministry. That is nothing remarkable, we think. But this ought not to be. We should know and bear in mind what we are. In the first place, we are elect of God, holy and beloved, of the household of God, and heirs of salvation, even as all other Christians. In the second place, we are, in a special sense, "servants of Christ." Does not that servant feel honored who is the servant of some great and mighty lord? Does he not glory in the fact that he is the servant of such a lord? And yet he serves but a man. Ministers of the Gospel, however, are servants of Christ; they serve the Lord of lords and King of kings. And as far as Christ is exalted above all principality and power and might and dominion in this world and in that which is to come, so much greater also is the servant of Christ than all the servants of earthly kings and potentates. Again, ministers are "stewards of God." How does he glory who is the steward, administrator, or counselor of some great, rich, and prominent man! But greater and richer as Jesus is than the richest and most prominent man on earth, so much greater also

is a steward of Christ than all the stewards and councilors of this world. Again, ministers are "ambassadors of God." How do men covet the position of ambassador! How do they glory when they receive an embassy and represent a president, king, or nation! What an honor to transact business in the name of a king or emperor, to say: "By virtue of my office as an envoy, ambassador, or plenipotentiary of my king and country!" But what is that compared with ministers of the Gospel who say: "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God!"

And this is what makes the holy ministry so important, because it delivers God's embassy or message unto men. As Nathan of old was God's messenger who told David what God Himself had to say, even so to-day God says to all His ministers: "Them that sin rebuke!" and again, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people!" And the Lord Jesus says to His ministers: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Ministers are the treasurers of God's riches. What an honor to be a treasurer in a king's palace, to have charge of keys that unlock vaults containing millions of dollars! But what is that compared with the honor which the Lord confers upon His ministers! To them He has given keys that unlock treasures which are of infinite value, of greater value than heaven and earth, the treasures of His grace; and these treasures the ministers dispense unto men. And now tell me, dear friends, is it not a great honor when a man has performed the functions of such an office for twenty-five long years? And you, dear brother in the Lord, unworthy as you may feel to-day of having filled this office so long a time, you may, you shall confess: "By the grace of God I am what I am! His grace I will magnify and glorify at all times!"

2.

But this is not all in which a Lutheran pastor may glory on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination to the ministry. He may glory not only: "By the grace of God I am what I am!" but also: "And His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain." Just when we see how exalted the office is to which God has called us, just then glorying in ourselves will fail us. On this Sunday, dear brother, which reminds you of the fact that you have been in the ministry twenty-five years, you would rather lament than glory. Instead of glorying, "My ministry was not in vain!" you would rather sigh, "Alas! my work was not crowned with much blessing; it was almost in vain, its success is not worth mentioning." You would rather join Pharaoh's butler in saying, "I do remember my faults this day." You think, also, of those to-day who would not heed the warning which you brought them from God, or who would not accept the pardon and salvation that God offered through you. You think of those to-day who were careless, callous, lukewarm, indifferent, and unbelieving, who rejected the Word of God which you proclaimed to them. Hence, you would rather sigh than glory, rather weep than rejoice; and yet you are to glory: "His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain."

Yes, if you had not preached God's Word purely, if you had not administered the Sacraments according to Christ's institution, then we would have to say to you to-day, "Your work was in vain, inasmuch as you preached false doctrines which were the command-

ments of men." And even if you had built hundreds of churches, and had organized hundreds of congregations, and had increased them ever so much, and if all the world would laud and praise your success, yet we would have to say, "You have labored in vain!" and on the last great day you would hear the awful word of Christ, "Depart from me, thou evil-doer; I never knew thee!" But thanks be to God! It is otherwise. With joyful confidence you can glory: Out of unmerited grace God has called me to be a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Our Lutheran Confessions are the pure, correct, and unadulterated explanation and presentation of God's holy Word and will.

God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure
Shall to eternity endure.

You can glory: By the grace of God I know that these Confessions contain the pure, crystal truth; I acknowledge them with my whole heart as my own confessions; according to them I have performed the duties of my office. I have proclaimed divine truth and nothing but divine truth. I have administered the Sacraments as Christ would have them administered.

Now, as sure as this is true, so surely also you may glory to-day, "His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain." For God's Word and Sacraments are not inefficacious, but efficacious. His Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. And faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. The Word of God is the incorruptible seed by which men are born again and made children of God. God Himself made this promise: "My Word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." The holy Sacraments have the same promise.

And now remember, dear brother, this Word you have preached for twenty-five years, in season and out of season. This mighty seed you have sown into the hearts of thousands, in the pulpit, in the school-room, in the confirmation class, on the floor of synods and conferences, and at the bedside of the sick and dying. Should God, could God permit His Word to be of none effect? Should His promise fail? Never! And as sure as God's own Word is true, so surely also you can glory, "His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain!" Has He not heard your prayers? Has He not kept His promise? Has He not blessed your work? Has He not crowned your efforts with success?

True, you may not be able to see much of the blessing which God has wrought through you, nor is it necessary, for "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall men say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." And, "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His."

Oh, then, glory to-day upon this twenty-fifth anniversary of your ordination to the ministry! Glory, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain!" The Lord Himself, however, bless you from on high and make you yet a blessing unto many. His grace be with you in the future as it was in the past. And at last may He grant you to stand at His own right hand and to hear the sweet and blessed word: "Well done, good and faithful servant! Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" Amen. O. K.